



National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

Public health professionals and policymakers require accurate and current statistical data. This information is used to account for illness and disability among populations in the United States. To be most effective, the data collected should monitor trends in medical conditions, risk behaviors, risk factors, health habits, environmental exposures, and emerging public health issues and technologies.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC conducts the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), the only national source of objectively measured health data capable of providing accurate estimates of both diagnosed and undiagnosed medical conditions in the population. NHANES represents a unique collaboration between CDC, the National Institutes of Health, and others to obtain data for biomedical research, public health, tracking health indicators, and policy development. Through physical examinations, clinical and laboratory tests, and interviews, NHANES assesses the health status of adults and children throughout the United States. Mobile examination centers travel across the nation, collecting data on chronic conditions, nutritional status, medical risk factors (e.g., high-cholesterol level, obesity, high blood pressure), dental health, vision, illicit drug use, blood lead levels, food safety, and other factors that are impossible to assess by use of interviews alone. Findings from this survey are essential for determining rates of major diseases and health conditions (e.g., cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, infectious diseases) and developing public health policies and prevention interventions.

Example of Program in Action:

Since 1960, NHANES data on measured height and weight have been used to determine obesity levels in the United States. Estimates of the prevalence of overweight and obesity among the U.S. population in 1999-2002 showed continuing increases among both children and adults. Among adults age 20 years and older, 65.1 percent were overweight or obese, with the prevalence of overweight and obesity among adults ranging from 57 percent among non-Hispanic white women to 77.2 percent among non-Hispanic black women. Among children 6-19 years of age, 16 percent were overweight, with Mexican American boys having a significantly higher prevalence of overweight at 25.5 percent than non-Hispanic black boys and non-Hispanic white boys at 17.9 percent and 14.3 percent respectively.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

- Ensure that NHANES field operations are fully supported to maintain the overall sample size of NHANES.
- Implement the Community Health and Nutrition and Examination Survey to provide flexible and timely access to quality examination and laboratory data for defined populations that cannot be addressed by use of the standard NHANES framework.